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ABSTRACT

A New Jersey Task Force on Adult Literacy recommended ways to improve the literacy delivery system for adults. This report and its recommendations focus on improving coordinated interagency planning and accountability to increase governmental efficiency, and on advancing the employability and self-sufficiency of the three million low-literate adults in New Jersey. The report asserts the idea that education is highly correlated with success; education affects employability, wages, productivity, the ability to function effectively in the family and community, and, ultimately, the state's economic well-being. A lack of literacy is directly related to the incidence of incarceration, dependency on public assistance, and a number of other social problems. Findings in this report, based on a 1994 survey of individuals age 16 to 64, reveal that nearly one-half of New Jersey's adults function at the lowest levels of literacy as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey. Recommendations include improved planning and coordination, ensured responsiveness to customer needs, expanded staff development opportunities, improved program accountability, and increased awareness of the importance of literacy programs. (Contains 16 references.) (AS)

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# The Literacy Connection

## Improving Adult Literacy in New Jersey

### Report and Recommendations from the Commission on Higher Education and the State Employment and Training Commission's Task Force on Adult Literacy

ED 425 780

of New Jersey's adults (based on a 1994 survey of individuals nearly one-half age 16 to 64) function at the lowest levels of liter cy as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey.

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JC 990 029

**September 1998**



Alfred J. Cade, Chair
Commission on Higher Education

Donald Loff, Co-Chair
Task Force on Adult Literacy

**Christine Todd Whitman**
**Governor**

John J. Heldrich, Chair
State Employment & Training Commission

Richard Fritzky, Co-Chair
Task Force on Adult Literacy



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## Task Force on Adult Literacy Members

Richard Fritzky, Co-Chair, Meadowlands Chamber of Commerce
Donald J. Loff, Co-Chair, PaineWebber, Inc.
Barbara Anderson, New Jersey Department of Education
Ronald Applbaum, Kean College
Isaac Ballard, New Jersey Department of Corrections
Lydia Barrett, Urban League of Essex County
Hal Beder, Rutgers University
Valerie Bianco, Monmouth Adult Educational Services Commission
Elizabeth Christopherson, New Jersey Network
Roger Emig, New Jersey Department of Treasury
Anthony Lutkus, Educational Testing Service
Brian McAndrew, Monmouth County Vocational School
Carol McMillan-Lonesome, Seton Hall University
Richard Messner, Somerset County Vocational School, Retired
Margery Oppenheimer, Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc.
Sister Mary Teresa Orbegozo, Paterson Adult and Continuing Education
Martine Hammond-Paludan, Commission on Higher Education
Henry Plotkin, New Jersey State Employment & Training Commission
Arlene Roth, New Jersey Department of Education
Anthony Sarlo, New Jersey Department of Corrections
Ellen Schechter, New Jersey Department of Education
Paul Scherbina, New Jersey Department of Labor
Thomas D. Sepe, Mercer County Community College
Dennis Testa, New Jersey Education Association
Donna Vassallo, Claridge Hotel and Casino
Margot Walsh, New Jersey Network
J. Robert White, New Jersey Department of Labor

## Staff Representatives

Lansing Davis, New Jersey State Employment & Training Commission
Daniel DeFrancesco, New Jersey State Employment & Training Commission
Angela Suchanic, Commission on Higher Education

Special thanks to Kay Hancock, Commission on Higher Education, and Ann Watkins, State Employment and Training Commission, for editorial assistance.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education (CHE) and the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) established the Task Force on Adult Literacy to recommend ways to improve the literacy delivery system for adults. This report and its recommendations focus on improving coordinated interagency planning and accountability to increase governmental efficiency, and on advancing the employability and self-sufficiency of the three million low-literate adults in New Jersey.

This Task Force report asserts that education is highly correlated with success in our society. Education affects individual employability, wages, productivity, the ability to function effectively in the family and community, and, ultimately, the state's economic well-being. A lack of literacy is directly related to the incidence of incarceration, dependency on public assistance, and a number of other social problems. Low literacy skills rob individuals of their future and undermine the economy of the state. In light of these realities, the findings in this report sound an alarming note: **nearly one-half of New Jersey's adults (based on a 1994 survey of individuals age 16 to 64) function at the lowest levels of literacy as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey**. Furthermore, New Jersey's literacy statistics present a more complete and disturbing picture:

- Between 43 to 51 percent (around three million) of New Jersey's adults function at the lowest two of five levels of literacy.

- Nearly three-quarters or approximately 280,500 adults who are poor or near poor perform at the lowest literacy levels.

- New Jersey's adults with adequate literacy levels are more likely to earn higher weekly wages and to work more weeks annually than those with low skill levels. Adults with the highest literacy levels have weekly median incomes nearly three times that of adults with the most limited skills.

- The median annual household income of adults with one to three years of college ($51,136) is almost twice that of households where adults did not graduate from high school ($28,879).

- New Jersey has the fifth largest number (about 967,000 or 13 percent) of foreign-born residents in the United States. A significant portion of these individuals are

adults who do not have sufficient proficiency in English to compete successfully in the workplace.

- Adults at the lowest literacy levels are more likely to receive food stamps or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Approximately 80 percent of recipients demonstrate skills at the lowest literacy levels.

- Between 70 and 75 percent (18,000 to 19,000) of incarcerated adults are estimated to function at the lowest literacy levels. Similar estimates apply to incarcerated youth.

- More than 12,000 students dropped out of the state's public high schools during each of the 1994-95 and 1995-96 school years.

- According to 1990 census data, more than 39,000 New Jersey youth between the ages of 16 to 19 years were not enrolled in school and had not earned a diploma. Approximately 25 percent of the state's residents age 25 or older lack a high school diploma or GED.

- More than 50 percent (approximately 5,000) of participants in the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Title II Programs have basic skills deficiencies.

- New Jersey residents who indicate that they vote have a significantly higher average literacy score than nonvoters.

In summary, low literacy levels are related to crime, unemployment and underemployment, public assistance, and many of the other social problems in which the state invests hundreds of million dollars each year. Developing a solid, well-coordinated literacy delivery system will enhance the chances of adults' success in the labor market and in society as a whole. A literate population is a precondition for solving many of society's ills.

**Definition of Literacy**

The Task Force adopted the following definition of literacy from the National Literacy Act of 1991:

> **an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential.**

More broadly, the Task Force views literacy as "the ability to recognize, interpret, and act on symbolic representations of our world through various forms of language and cultural

expression" (Drapper III, cited in Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993) and operates under the general belief that "facility in manipulating these symbols, whether through the written word, numbers or images is essential to effective human development" (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993). Although the Task Force focused on the full range of adult literacy programs, it placed particular emphasis on the two lowest of five levels of literacy as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey.

## THE CURRENT LITERACY SYSTEM

In analyzing the literacy delivery system, the report concludes that the system is disjointed, comprising an array of programs funded through various federal, state, local, and private sources, with little or no central coordination or oversight. For example, seven state agencies (the Departments of Corrections, Education, Human Services, and Labor; the Commission on Higher Education; New Jersey Network; and the State Library) support at least 17 programs that provide adult literacy education at a cost of approximately $36 million.

State and local initiatives occur without benefit of a common vision, master plan, coordinated financing, and oversight. State and federal dollars flow through these state programs to local service providers to operate a variety of program models. Many of these programs also receive supplemental funding for literacy activities from nonfederal and state sources. In addition, some programs receive federal funds directly.

Adult literacy educators and other practitioners who provide services to low-literate adults do not have sufficient opportunities for training and information sharing. Initiatives in these areas are now tied primarily to traditional modes of delivery.

The use of technology to enhance professional development should be explored fully, including standards for the acquisition of computer hardware and software to facilitate training and information sharing and a requirement that funded programs make technology, including television, available to staff. Better coordination and communication between state agencies and local policy makers and providers also will improve professional development.

The Task Force acknowledges recent efforts by the Department of Education to restructure the delivery system, foster collaboration among local providers, and provide a continuum of comprehensive programs and services that are coordinated and integrated with other state, federal, and local efforts. It concludes, however, that increased integration and cooperation at state and local levels are needed to achieve greater overall efficiencies. The development of sound literacy skills is at the foundation of the workforce readiness system. State and local planning and oversight efforts must be inclusive, bringing together key stakeholders in this system. Only then will the state realize the benefits of many of its other investments in human capital.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force identified six areas for improvement:

1. **Improve planning and coordination.**

   - Establish a State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services within the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC). The Council will facilitate state and local planning, review federal and state legislation, establish statewide benchmarks, develop a statewide strategy to facilitate and improve professional development and information sharing, improve communication between government and literacy providers, recommend strategies to expand family literacy efforts, as well as other initiatives.

     Although the Council will be charged with planning, policy development, and oversight, it **will not** assume the operational authority of any state agency. **Final approval and implementation of all plans and recommendations will rest with the legally designated authorities.**

   - Develop a coordinated statewide master plan for adult literacy education that will encompass initiatives of individual state agencies.

   - Explore consolidating literacy initiatives of multiple state agencies, where appropriate; develop a more coherent service delivery system by leveraging funds from various sources; and encourage greater collaboration at state and local levels.

2. **Ensure responsiveness to customer needs.**

   - Adopt common assessment standards for all state-funded programs to determine clients' literacy levels, their goals, and the cause of any learning deficit.

   - Encourage providers to teach literacy skills within the context of the workplace and develop workplace literacy initiatives.

   - Connect adult literacy and family literacy initiatives.

   - Assess literacy needs of unemployed and underemployed populations, such as welfare clients, and develop strategies to meet these needs.

- Establish a clearinghouse to make information on literacy programs and related services accessible to clients via mail, public television, telephone, and Workforce New Jersey Public Information Network (WNJPIN).

- Develop an accessible and flexible literacy delivery system that responds to clients' needs, provides 24-hour access, and offers instruction at various locations and through several media (including computers and public television).

3. **Optimize the use of technology.**

- Build upon technology plans being developed for the K-12 and higher education systems as well as utilize the existing technology infrastructure to enhance literacy delivery.

- Utilize Workforce New Jersey Public Information Network (WNJPIN) as a resource for learners and educators.

- Enlist New Jersey's major communications companies in the effort to enhance the literacy delivery system through the use of technology.

4. **Expand staff development opportunities.**

- Develop a statewide staff development plan that involves the Department of Education's adult literacy training site, the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center (ALEC), which is a part of the Office of Specialized Populations; the state's higher education institutions; and the resources of the other state agencies to deliver staff development programs.

- Enhance the resource library housed at ALEC and make it more accessible.

- Establish an electronic hub for staff development and information sharing and make it accessible through WNJPIN.

- Explore more fully the use of current and new technology to facilitate staff development and information sharing.

5. **Improve program accountability.**

- Develop further accountability measures, benchmarks, and program outcomes that are congruent with *A Unified State Plan for New Jersey's*

*Workforce Readiness System*, federal requirements, and the recommended adult literacy plan.

- Assess program outcomes and make this information available to the public in an annual report and use this information for continuous program improvement.

6. **Improve awareness of the importance of literacy programs.**

   - Work with public and private sector organizations to develop strategies to publicize the problem of low literacy as well as the services available to address it.

   - Enlist New Jersey's foreign language business community in the effort to improve the awareness of the state's literacy delivery system.

   - Educate Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), local businesses, and other key stakeholders to make them aware of the major issues associated with the needs of low-literacy clients and how best to serve them.

# REPORT

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education (CHE) and the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) established the Task Force on Adult Literacy in the fall of 1996. These Commissions charged the Task Force with recommending ways to improve the literacy delivery system for adults. The Task Force focused on increasing governmental efficiency, improving coordination and accountability, and advancing the employability and self-sufficiency of the three million low-literate citizens of New Jersey.

Recommendations contained in both CHE's planning document, *Looking to the Millennium: New Jersey's Plan for Higher Education* (1996) and the SETC's *A Unified State Plan for New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System* (1996) call for a literacy task force to review the need for adult literacy services and to examine the full range of literacy programs in the state.

This effort to examine and improve the delivery of literacy services is not the first the state has undertaken. More than thirty years ago, the Governor's Task Force on Adult Literacy Opportunities in New Jersey issued a report to former Governor Richard Hughes that described adult illiteracy in New Jersey as a "problem of massive proportions" (1966). In 1993, the New Jersey Council on Adult Education and Literacy, created by former Governor James Florio, released a report outlining priorities and recommendations in three areas: family literacy, workplace literacy, and adult education and the literacy delivery system.

At the federal level, in 1991, Congress established an ambitious goal that "every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." In 1998, we are far from reaching that goal. Furthermore, the definition of what it means to be literate continues to expand as we undergo the rapid transformation to an information-based society.

### Work of the Task Force

The Task Force, co-chaired by Richard Fritzky, a member of the State Employment and Training Commission and President of the Meadowlands Chamber of Commerce, and Donald Loff, a member of the Commission on Higher Education and Senior Vice President-Investments at PaineWebber, Inc., included representatives from business and industry; organized labor; adult education; K-12 education; higher education; community-based organizations; the State Departments of Corrections, Education,

Human Services, Labor, and Treasury; New Jersey Network; the Commission on Higher Education; and the State Employment and Training Commission.

The Task Force placed particular emphasis on Levels 1 and 2 as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). The NALS levels are based on a person's proficiency in performing literacy tasks on three dimensions: Prose, Document, and Quantitative. The average score for adults with less than a high school diploma falls within the two lowest levels (1 and 2) of the five NALS levels. For adults whose highest level of educational achievement is high school completion, the average score is at the high end of Level 2. (See Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of the literacy levels.)

The report of the Task Force on Adult Literacy incorporates the following information: research on successful national and state initiatives; public hearing testimony; Task Force discussions and subcommittee reports; a survey of New Jersey's college and university literacy programs; the 1993 report and recommendations of the New Jersey Council on Adult Education and Literacy; two studies conducted by Educational Testing Service (ETS) for the National Center for Education Statistics, *Adult Literacy in America* (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993) and *Adult Literacy in New Jersey* (Jenkins and Kirsch, 1994); and comments to the Task Force by Irwin Kirsch, Principal Research Scientist at ETS and coauthor of the two aforementioned adult literacy studies.

The Task Force developed a detailed action plan, which included creating a number of subcommittees to conduct research and develop findings. In the first phase of the Task Force's work, four subcommittees developed a contextual summary, inventoried New Jersey's literacy programs, researched literacy structures and practices in other states, and developed a plan for public input. Each group conducted extensive research to develop its report. For example, as a part of the inventory of New Jersey's literacy programs, a subcommittee surveyed designated state agencies, the Workforce Investment Boards, and New Jersey's colleges and universities. The subcommittee examining literacy structures and practices in other states interviewed experts with firsthand knowledge of literacy provision in Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Washington.

The report recommends improvements in the delivery of literacy services to meet the needs of the state and those adults with inadequate skills. Although the Task Force built upon the findings of the 1993 Report, *Adult Literacy in New Jersey: Meeting the Challenge of the 21st Century*, issued by the New Jersey Council on Adult Education and Literacy, it focused most of its attention on the administration and delivery of literacy programs since that time. The Task Force addressed efficiency, coordination, and accountability to transform the current patchwork of programs with few formal ties into a fully integrated component of the workforce readiness system. **The stakes are high. Increasing the employability and self-sufficiency of three million citizens with low literacy skills must be a major priority for New Jersey.**

**Definition of Literacy**

In its initial deliberations the Task Force adopted the definition of literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (National Literacy Act of 1991). The Task Force also views literacy more broadly as "the ability to recognize, interpret, and act on symbolic representations of our world through various forms of language and cultural expression" (Drapper III, cited in Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993) and operates under the general belief that "facility in manipulating these symbols, whether through the written word, numbers or images, is essential to effective human development" (Kirsch et al., 1993). Operationally, the Task Force based its measure of literacy on the five literacy levels as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS). These levels reflect varying degrees of proficiency in completing literacy tasks, rather than dichotomizing the population into illiterates and literates. As such, NALS levels are not a measure of illiteracy. Although the Task Force agreed to focus on the full range of literacy programs that currently serves adults, it placed particular emphasis on Levels 1 and 2. GED programs and adult high schools typically serve students in Levels 2-5.

**FINDINGS**

New Jersey's population of adults in need of literacy education is expanding. High school dropouts, immigrants, and high school graduates with low skills swell the numbers. The current system does not have the capacity to meet existing needs, much less projected demands. The state needs a new model, similar to preventive medicine, to address adequately the needs of adults with low levels of literacy. Both improved efficiency within the delivery system and a greater investment to support adult literacy education is essential. The costs of failing to provide adequate literacy services are tremendous—to the individual, economy, and society.

The Task Force findings are as follows:

- There is an ever-expanding need for literacy services resulting from a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and those demanded by the changing economy. Among adults requiring such services are dislocated, unemployed and underemployed workers, immigrant populations, and persons in transition from welfare to work or incarceration to work.

- The literacy delivery system is disjointed, comprising an array of programs funded through a variety of federal, state, local, and private sources, with little or no central coordination or oversight. For example, seven state agencies (the Departments of Corrections, Education, Human Services, and Labor; the

Commission on Higher Education; New Jersey Network; and the State Library) support at least 17 programs that provide literacy training at a cost of approximately $36 million.

- These state and local initiatives all occur without benefit of a master plan, coordinated financing, or oversight. State and federal dollars flow through these state programs to local service providers to operate various program models. Many of these programs also receive supplemental funding for literacy activities from nonfederal and state sources. Additionally, some programs receive federal funds directly. This lack of coordination leads to a duplication of effort and an inability to maximize resources in the pursuit of established state priorities.

- Standards for evaluating program quality are not consistent across programs and are therefore ineffective in assessing the literacy delivery system.

- Communication is limited between and among state and local programs. This hampers the ability of the literacy providers to maximize resources and coordinate staff development, training, planning, and accountability.

**Literacy Levels**

Despite a range of adult education programs in place through various state, federal, and private agencies, low literacy remains a serious problem in New Jersey. Between 2.6 and 3.1 million adult New Jerseyans score at the lowest two of the five literacy levels measured by the National Adult Literacy Survey (Jenkins and Kirsch, 1994). Persons at these levels generally experience difficulty in performing tasks requiring integration or synthesis of information from complex or lengthy texts or in performing complex quantitative tasks. For example, they may find it difficult to write a brief letter explaining an error made on a credit card bill; use a bus schedule to determine the appropriate bus for a given set of conditions; or, using a calculator, determine the difference between the regular and sale price printed in an advertisement.

At the low end of the continuum of adult education programs are those providing basic literacy training; at a higher level are programs that prepare adults to receive high school diplomas. The State Board of Education identified new core curriculum content standards for the K-12 level that also apply to students in adult high school programs, but not as yet to Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Development (GED), and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

**Literacy, Economy, and Society**

New Jersey is at a critical juncture. It must prepare all citizens for current and future challenges so that they can succeed as family members, citizens, workers, and lifelong learners. Central to this success is the ability to secure employment and maintain employability.

> [A]ttainment of fundamental levels of literacy and basic skills lies at the heart of the workforce readiness system. . . . As New Jersey enters the 21st century, it faces an era of enormous change that in some ways is more profound than that of previous generations. Deep changes in the labor market have affected the skills demanded of the workforce, while reduced job security has put a premium on the ability of workers to adapt to these circumstances. (SETC, 1996)

Basic skills have become a necessity for adults to earn a living wage and to participate fully in society. A basic high school diploma or GED should be regarded as a minimum level of achievement to succeed in the modern labor market; it can enable recipients to begin a lifelong learning process. Through the year 2000, the majority of new jobs will require advanced literacy skills and lifelong learning, with high paying jobs necessitating education beyond high school. For those who have been poorly served by the educational system and underrepresented in postsecondary educational programs, the gap between their skills and what is needed for full participation in society is widening. Irwin Kirsch of ETS, among others, warns that unless literacy skills become a priority, low educational achievement will combine with demographic, economic, and social changes to create a more divided society.

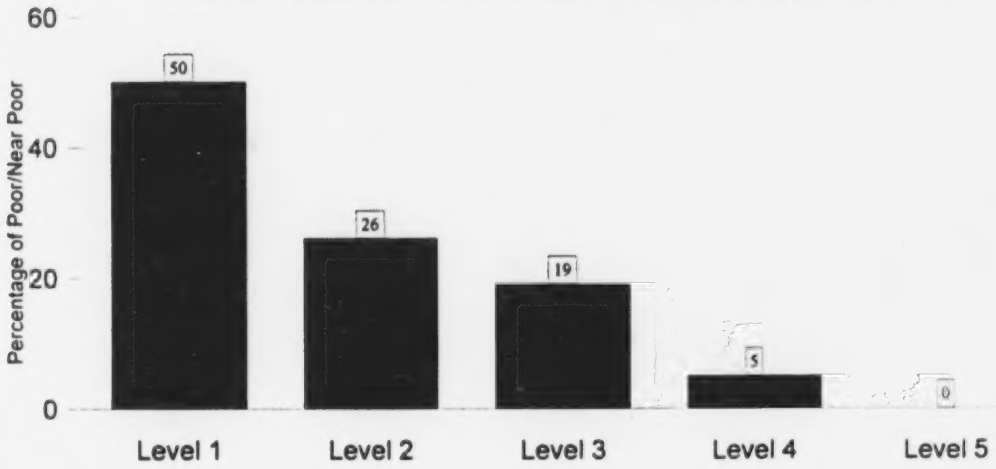
A highly literate workforce is of paramount importance to employers. Yet, surveys show significant gaps between the skills needed by employers and the skills potential workers have. A national survey of 300 small to larger businesses indicated that only nine percent of employers considered high school graduates able to communicate well verbally or read training manuals. Likewise, only six percent of the employers considered high school graduates able to communicate through writing and only eight percent stated that graduates had basic math skills (*Workforce Preparedness*, 1997).

A continually expanding definition of minimal basic skills increases employers' expectations of what constitutes literacy. Accelerated social, technological, and economic changes are creating a demand for greater skills. Within the past decade, the amount of available information grew exponentially, requiring more advanced levels of comprehension, problem solving, and critical thinking. In addition, the ability to process information through technology is becoming a prerequisite skill, widening the gap between those who have that skill and those who do not.

Central to the work of the Task Force was the premise that literacy is fundamental to citizens' roles in the workforce, the home, and the community. The State Adult Literacy Survey (Jenkins and Kirsch, 1994) demonstrated that approximately three-quarters of adults who were poor or near poor performed at the lowest two literacy levels as measured by NALS (Chart 1). On average, these individuals have lower median weekly incomes and lower annual household incomes than adults who function at higher levels of

# Literacy and Economy

Percentage of Adults Who Are Poor or Near Poor by Prose Literacy Levels




Source of data: Jenkins and Kirsch, *Adult Literacy in New Jersey*, 1994

literacy. For example, the median weekly earnings for state residents who performed at Level 1 were between $288 and $307 and for Level 2, $343 and $377. In contrast, the median weekly earnings for adults at Level 4 were $620 to $666 and for adults at Level 5, $836. The average annual household income for state residents who score at Level 1 was approximately $25,000. However, the annual household income was roughly $70,000 for those who perform at Level 5. Working adults who scored at the lowest two levels of literacy were more likely to be employed in jobs at lower skill levels, such as laborers and assemblers, and far less likely to have professional or managerial positions. The survey also indicated that adults performing at the two lowest levels were more likely to receive food stamps or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); approximately 80 percent of welfare and food stamp recipients function at these levels. Adults without a high school diploma or GED tend to stay on welfare longer than those with greater educational attainment. Persons scoring at the lowest two NALS levels also were less likely to vote than those who perform at the higher levels of the scale.

As Beder notes in *Adult Literacy: Issues for Policy and Practice* (1991),

> **there is a strong relationship between adult illiteracy and low socioeconomic status as defined by income, occupational status, and educational attainment. However defined, the adult literacy population is poorer, less educated, and employed in jobs of lower status than the general population.** (p. 24)

Literacy proficiency also tends to be intergenerational. As indicated in *Adult Literacy in America* (1993) and information from the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), children's literacy levels correlate strongly with the educational levels of their parents, particularly their mothers. In fact, a significant predictor of a child's success in school is a caregiver who has completed high school. This intergenerational linkage is especially significant because 43 to 51 percent of New Jersey's adults are at the lowest two levels of literacy skills.

In summary, those who have more education earn higher wages. The median annual household income of adults with one to three years of college is $51,136, almost twice the amount of $28,879 that adults who did not graduate from high school receive. (US Bureau of the Census, November 1996).

**Summary of Literacy Needs**

According to the New Jersey Department of Education publications, *Vital Education Statistics* (1994-95 and 1995-96 editions), New Jersey public schools enrolled 343,438 secondary students (grades 9-12) during the 1994-95 school year, and a reported 12,258 dropped out. During 1995-96, 343,345 secondary students were enrolled and a reported 12,662 dropped out. These numbers include highly mobile and foreign-born students who leave school districts without a transfer of records. The year-to-year cumulative

count of those who drop out from the state's public school system combined with the migration of dropouts from other states into New Jersey adds to the population of low-literate adults. The 1990 Census revealed that more than 39,000 persons between the ages of 16 to 19 years were not enrolled in school and had not earned a diploma. Approximately 25 percent of the state's residents age 25 or older lack a high school diploma or GED. Coupled with the problem of dropouts is the significant number of students who complete school but lack the skills necessary to continue their education or be successful in the workplace and other adult life roles.

Data from New Jersey's government agencies and state and national reports support the call for deliberate action. According to the Department of Labor, more than 50 percent (approximately 5,000) of participants in the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Title II Programs have skill deficiencies in reading, writing, and computation. Likewise, the National Institute for Literacy (1994) reports that nearly 50 percent of welfare recipients do not have a high school diploma or GED. Adults with low literacy skills are also more likely to be school dropouts, teenage parents, jobless, welfare recipients, or involved in crime.

As in other states, the number of adults in New Jersey's correctional institutions continues to rise. National estimates reported in *Literacy Behind Prison Walls* (Haigler, Harlow, O'Connor, and Campbell, 1994) and those cited for New Jersey in *Standing Corrected: Education and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders* (SETC, 1997) indicate that between 70 and 75 percent of incarcerated adults (more than 17,000) have skills at the lowest two literacy levels, with approximately one-third with disabilities that have hampered their educational progress (Haigler et al., 1994). Similar estimates are offered for incarcerated youth (SETC, 1997). The New Jersey Department of Corrections provides educational services to about 9,700 inmates annually.

New Jersey has the fifth largest number (almost 967,000 or 13 percent) of foreign-born residents in the United States (US Bureau of the Census, 1990). The educational background of adult immigrants varies greatly, as does their proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending English. A significant number of these residents wish to increase their English proficiency.

Fifty to 80 percent of adults enrolled in Adult Basic Education and Literacy Services are learning disabled (National Adult Literacy and Learning Disability Center). These adults present unique challenges to practitioners.

Many current jobs as well as those now being produced by the economy require literacy levels above Levels 1 and 2 on the NALS scale. Employers complain that many prospective workers lack the literacy and workplace readiness skills necessary for entry-level or advanced positions within their organizations. New Jersey spends millions of dollars each year to support literacy programs designed to improve workers' skill levels

while addressing employers' needs. For example, the state's Customized Training Program contributed $2.3 million in 1997 to employer literacy initiatives, and the Department of Labor's Business Resource Network allocated another $1 million.

**Federal Initiatives**

In 1991, Congress amended the Adult Education Act (P.L. 100-297) with the National Literacy Act (P.L. 102-73) to ensure that all adults would acquire necessary basic skills by the year 2000. The goal was to ensure that "every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship." The Act encouraged the formation of State Advisory Councils on Adult Education and Literacy and directed them to develop comprehensive policy recommendations for improving the delivery of adult education and workplace literacy in the states. The Act also established a National Institute of Literacy, State Resource Centers (for which funding was cut as of federal FY 1996), and Workplace Literacy and Even Start programs. Congress appropriated funds to carry out these projects aimed at achieving the ambitious goal of eliminating illiteracy by the year 2000.

Additionally, the Act established the National Institute for Literacy as a national focal point for building public policy, monitoring programs, disseminating information on best practices, and conducting research. The Institute serves as a catalyst for interagency coordination at the federal and state levels.

The Institute represents just one of several federally funded centers. Among others are the following:

- The National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, which promotes awareness about learning disabilities and builds the capacity of programs to help serve adult students with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities.

- The National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning, a joint project of Harvard University and World Education, funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which conducts applied research and disseminates its results.

Additional recent federal initiatives that impact on literacy include the following:

- Literacy AmeriCorps, which operates literacy networks in urban areas.

- Greater appropriations for adult education and literacy. The final federal 1997 appropriation was 38 percent higher than that of the previous year.

- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, signed into law in August 1996, which drastically altered the welfare system by eliminating a federal entitlement to cash benefits, offering more flexible block grants to states, and establishing a 60-month lifetime cap on cash assistance.

The Job Training Partnership Act, through the U.S. Department of Labor, funds a significant amount of literacy activity to help prepare adults for work. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) also provides funds to local housing authorities to offer literacy training for their residents.

**State Initiatives**

Literacy initiatives abound at the state level. Programs range from those geared toward ameliorating the literacy skill deficiencies of adults with very low skills, e.g., ABE and volunteer programs, to those that address obtaining academic proficiency at the high school level, e.g., adult high school and GED programs. These high school level programs address a higher level skill set and a higher level learner although a significant portion of these individuals function within Level 2 as measured by NALS.

Although the Department of Education is the principal agency charged with administering adult education/literacy programs, six other state agencies also are engaged in the provision of these programs. Collecting information on all the literacy initiatives operated by the state was problematic. Programs had different reporting cycles, making it difficult to obtain data for a given time frame across programs. What constituted literacy programs also varied. Many programs do not have literacy development as a primary charge but provide this training as part of their overall activities. It was difficult to discern what resources these programs devoted specifically to literacy.

***State Employment and Training Commission (SETC)***

The SETC serves as the state's "Human Resource Investment Council" with a mission of coordinating New Jersey's training, employment, and education systems that affect workforce readiness. Established in 1989, this public-private partnership's core agenda is outlined in *A Unified State Plan for New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System*. The plan incorporates four core principles, one of which states that attainment of fundamental levels of literacy is at the heart of the system.

The SETC ensures that coordination of the Workforce Readiness System at the state level is mirrored at the local level through Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). Governor Whitman's Executive Order #36 created WIBs to establish policy and coordinate services for the workforce readiness system. These bodies will determine if the current system meets the demands of both customers and the labor market.

***Department of Education***

The Adult Basic Skills and GED programs are operated under the supervision of the Office of Specialized Populations in the New Jersey Department of Education (DOE). The Department also provides funding for adult high schools, which are regulated by state statute and operated under the authority of the State Board of Education, and Evening Schools for the Foreign Born. In an effort to address fragmentation of services, the department recently initiated a restructured delivery system that encouraged the development of countywide consortia in which adult education providers in a county could submit a joint application for funding.

The Department of Education's Adult Basic Skills Request for Proposals (RFP) for 1997-98 represents the initial phase of restructuring the adult education delivery system. The Department seeks to eliminate fragmentation and strengthen statewide programs so that adults can achieve success. The RFP solicited proposals for a continuum of comprehensive adult education programs that integrate essential instructional components and support services; coordinate activities with other state, federal, and local efforts, such as School-to-Work, Workforce Investment Boards, welfare reform efforts, and the One-Stop Career Center System; foster the use of technology in instruction; and encourage partnerships with business and industry. Using a combination of federal and state funds, the Department of Education awarded 35 grants to individual providers and consortia of providers representing 106 agencies. (For more details on the RFP see Appendix B.)

In 1996-97, the year before release of the new RFP, the New Jersey Department of Education funded 87 adult basic education (including English as a Second Language), 28 volunteer literacy, and 47 GED programs with a combination of federal and state dollars. In addition, state aid and local district funding supported 56 adult high schools.

Although enrollment figures for 1996-97 were not available, 47,406 adults participated in these programs during 1995-96 and 16,999 persons took the GED test. Of this number, 9,120 people earned credentials. In addition, adult basic skills and English as a Second Language programs and volunteer literacy programs reported serving a total of 31,756 students; GED programs served a total of 6,410 students for a combined total of 38,166. Of this number, 19,539 were reported to be ESL students. The 56 adult high schools identified above enrolled 9,245 students and reported 2,129 graduates. The DOE also supported 52 Evening Schools for the Foreign Born.

The infrastructure for professional development includes the DOE's training site, the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center, which is under the auspices of the Office of Specialized Populations. The DOE is able to offer statewide and regional training initiatives to facilitate professional development and information sharing in adult education. This training site also houses a resource library.

Additionally, New Jersey received a $37 million federal grant for the School-to-Work Opportunities Initiative to connect more closely school-based and work-based education. Jointly administered with the Department of Labor, this program connects schools, employers, and other stakeholders to ensure the integration of a strong and forward-looking "School-to-Work" curriculum in all of New Jersey's schools.

***Department of Labor***

The New Jersey Department of Labor sponsors literacy-related programs. The Workforce Development Partnership Program began in 1992 with funding through the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund. The program offers customized training to companies seeking to improve the skills of their workforce, as well as individual grants to dislocated workers. These grants can fund up to $1,000 for basic literacy training as part of approved individual occupational training. Approximately $2.3 million in customized training funds from this program supported literacy initiatives during the 1997 state fiscal year. The Department's Business Resource Network offers basic skills education at the workplace, which is closely aligned with the initiatives of the Workforce Development Partnership Program. Jointly funded by the Departments of Labor and Education, the network expended approximately $1 million in fiscal year 1997.

The federally funded Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA), administered by the Department, awards funds to the state's 17 local Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) to provide training to economically disadvantaged or dislocated workers. A portion of this money (approximately $4.2 million) for program year 1996 supported literacy training for clients.

One of the newer developments is One-Stop Career Centers that are designed to change the way workforce readiness services are delivered. In 1995, the state received $4.7 million, the first installment of a three-year federal grant, to implement this system. Through the use of technology, staff training, and policy guidance by local Workforce Investment Boards, performance-driven One-Stop Career Centers integrate services and provide for customer choice and universal access under the concept of "no wrong door." Workforce New Jersey's Public Information Network (WNJPIN), New Jersey's labor market home page, is an integral part of these services, enabling workers, students, and those seeking employment and the employer community to access information on the Internet about education, training, and job opportunities.

***Department of Human Services***

Of prime importance to the New Jersey Department of Human Services is Work First New Jersey, the state's response to national welfare legislation. Nearly half of all welfare recipients do not have a high school diploma or GED. Work First New Jersey's purpose is to break the cycle of welfare dependency by making work the goal for welfare recipients, making work pay by allowing recipients to keep more earnings as they ease off welfare, setting a five-year time limit for receiving welfare benefits, and providing

subsidized child care and extended health benefits to recipients to ease their transition into the workforce. Work First New Jersey requires adults to work or prepare for work.

Because a significant portion of welfare recipients lack the education skills necessary to compete in the labor market, the Alternative Work Experience Program (AWEP) has been developed as an allowable work learning option. AWEP consists of twenty hours work experience per week on a temporary basis with a public, private nonprofit, or private charitable employer combined with another fifteen hours of literacy, vocational education, and/or substance abuse treatment per week. For FY 1998, approximately $7.3 million is allocated for AWEP through, funds made available by both the Departments of Human Services and Labor.

***Department of Corrections***

The Department of Corrections, through its Office of Educational Services, administers a variety of academic, prevocational, and vocational programs in each of its 15 institutions. Literacy is a fundamental component of each program. Through its institutions, the Department provides direct services to its clients.

***Commission on Higher Education***

The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education distributes an annual state appropriation for the Education of Language Minority Students. The Commission on Higher Education awarded funding in FY 1998 to five programs at different college and university campuses across the state to enhance services to limited English proficient students.

In spring 1997, the Commission on Higher Education conducted a survey of the campuses in the state to identify the scope of literacy programs sponsored at the institutional level. The survey revealed that 24 of the state's colleges and universities sponsored a total of 48 discrete literacy programs. Seventeen of the 19 community colleges reported having literacy programs on their campuses. Two of the three public research universities and four of the nine state colleges/universities indicated sponsoring literacy programs. In contrast, only two of the 16 private colleges/universities and none of the proprietary schools licensed by the Commission on Higher Education sponsored literacy programs. Two-thirds of the programs were funded at least partly from grant funds. Many of the programs received funding from the following sources: New Jersey Department of Education (primarily through Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language), Job Training Partnership Act, New Jersey Division of Family Development, New Jersey Department of Labor, and individual corporations.

***New Jersey Network***

New Jersey Network (NJN), in collaboration with the Department of Education, is implementing an adult literacy distance learning initiative, which delivers instruction in Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and GED. Because NJN's

signal reaches 2.8 million television households throughout the state, a large number of students can potentially access this distance learning format. This provides another example of a state-level direct services provider.

***State Library***

The State Library, formerly administered through the Department of Education and now under the direction of Thomas Edison State College, receives federal funds that it distributes through competitive grants to local libraries. Although the grants are not designated for adult literacy, the funds may be used for this purpose.

**Local Programs**

Local programs exist in every county of the state. Typically, they receive their funding directly from the federal government, state agencies, local government, private sources, and/or fee for services. WIBs have begun to inventory providers in their counties, but obtaining the information is difficult because state and local coordination does not exist across all programs.

Volunteer literacy programs also play a critical role in local literacy initiatives. They are a part of the continuum of adult basic education, serving as an outreach and preparatory arm for public adult basic education and job training programs. These public and private nonprofit community-based organizations provide instructional and support services often to the hardest-to-reach, hardest-to-teach adults and out-of-school youth. Adults enrolled in these programs need individualized literacy instruction in addition to help with self-esteem and life skills before they are ready for a classroom situation. Many also need flexible hours of instruction because of demanding schedules. Volunteer tutors serve not only as instructors but also as role models and mentors. These groups often operate on limited budgets and are supported by New Jersey's government, businesses, libraries, churches, and other sources.

**Summary of Initiatives**

Federal and state funding typically flows to state agencies and then to local programs that provide direct services to students, although there are also examples of direct funding to local providers. In addition, funding can flow from one state agency to another, as in the case of the support the Department of Education provides to the Department of Labor's Business Resource Network, the Department of Corrections, and the Department of Human Services. At the state level, at least two programs directly fund employer-based literacy initiatives. The Department of Corrections and New Jersey Network are two state agencies that provide services directly to clients. In addition, some local programs provide direct services to employers. Using federal and state funds, the Department of Education supports two high school completion initiatives: Adult High Schools and GED programs. Adult Basic Education and English skills for students whose primary language is not English are supported at the state level primarily through the Department of Education's RFP process and Work First New Jersey. Small federal and state grants also

have been available through the Department of Community Affairs, the Commission on Higher Education, and the State Library to support local programs. Federal and state funds, however, are directed at achieving individual program agendas rather than larger state objectives.

Overall the Task Force found little evidence of coordination or joint planning among programs and agencies. Currently no forum exists at the state level to foster such coordination. These programs function in isolation, with each program setting its own procedures and standards, despite the Department of Education's recent efforts in its Adult Basic Skills grant programs. As a consequence, local programs suffer from the same detachment from the system as is seen at the state level. As individual initiatives, state and local programs seem to be effective in meeting their stated goals. There continues, however, to be an absence of coordination among these programs and long-term strategic planning among agencies and other key players.

**Research on Other States**

Through the Subcommittee on Research on Other States, the Task Force on Adult Literacy selected and interviewed four national experts on adult literacy programs to determine the key elements that facilitate effective programs and system development in other states. Twelve elements were identified:

1. Leadership that is characterized by true partnerships between local providers, the State Department of Education, and other critical stakeholders.

2. Centralized coordination through a coordinating body.

3. Strategic planning that guides state and local responses.

4. A customer-driven system that reflects the needs of all stakeholders, including students and employers.

5. A well-developed infrastructure for communication at state and local levels.

6. Support and trust among all stakeholders.

7. A comprehensive customer-driven system for staff development that provides opportunities for local program staff to participate in planning.

8. Funds from various sources that are leveraged to ensure effective/efficient support for a common state agenda.

9. Accountability measures that provide common data across programs and allow for assessing programs by their quality.

10. A comprehensive and intensive delivery system, with highest need areas receiving greatest focus and support.

11. Workforce education as an essential element of the overall literacy effort because of the attention to workforce development and welfare-to-work.

12. Technology, with an emphasis on electronic delivery of services, that is incorporated into the overall literacy plan.

These elements were presented to the Task Force and subsequently integrated into the final Task Force recommendations. (See Appendix C for more detailed findings of this research.)

**Public Input**

In June 1997, the Task Force convened three public hearings in Newark, Gloucester, and Trenton. A total of 28 persons provided testimony that focused on using technology, integrating literacy into the state's overall workforce readiness agenda, developing cooperative measures between public and private providers, and coordinating services to the user. The commentators discussed the benefits of using technology to facilitate instruction and staff development but noted the need for human interaction. Improved literacy skills were seen as essential for workforce development, and presenters expressed the view that low literacy correlated with unemployment or low-paying jobs. Comments also stressed the need for up-to-date information on the various services available to address clients' needs. New Jersey's One-Stop Career Center System was seen as one mechanism for providing current information on programs. Commentators also mentioned the need for improved coordination at the state level and the importance of collaboration between literacy providers and other agencies to better serve the client.

The testimony served as a backdrop for the Task Force's continued deliberations and its report and recommendations (see Appendix D). The Task Force also received a summary of participants' comments from a workshop on adult education and welfare-to-work held at the 1997 Annual Adult Education Conference conducted by the Department of Education's Adult Literacy Enhancement Center. The workshop moderator, a national expert on adult education and welfare, provided the summary.

The full Task Force, CHE, SETC, and selected external readers reviewed a draft report. This report, therefore, is a product of extensive input and discussion within the Task Force and beyond.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force identified six areas for improvement: planning and coordination at the state and local levels, responsiveness to customer needs, staff development, the use of technology, program accountability, and advocacy. It proposes that the state address these issues through the creation of a State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services, which will develop a state master plan for adult literacy education. The Task Force, therefore, offers the following recommendations to improve New Jersey's literacy delivery system.

### Improve Planning and Coordination

Limited resources and a multitude of client needs dictate a more coordinated, effective, and cost-efficient approach to the delivery of service. To achieve this goal, the Task Force recommends that:

**A State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services be created within the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC).** The SETC, whose mission is to facilitate joint planning and oversight among workforce readiness agencies and to give the private sector a voice in the process, is the logical place to house the Council. The SETC, through its broad-based membership, which includes the private sector, state workforce readiness agencies, and other key stakeholders in the system, provides a forum for ideas and perspectives that can offer immeasurable benefit to the Council in pursuing its agenda. The collaborative decision-making process employed by the SETC ensures agreement and commitment.

Council membership should include the various state and local agencies and stakeholder groups for adult education and workforce readiness. The mission of this body should be to facilitate statewide and local policy development, planning, and oversight in consultation with stakeholders. Among its responsibilities, the Council should address the following goals:

- Facilitate state planning and local planning through WIBs and among service providers to assure concurrence with a proposed state master plan for adult literacy education.

- Review federal and state legislation (including welfare-to-work and impending workforce development legislation) and develop and modify literacy plans accordingly.

- Develop appropriate performance standards, impact measures and statewide benchmarks to measure the entire system and programs.

- Develop a statewide strategy to facilitate and improve professional development and information sharing for practitioners and policy makers and to promote the availability of services to learners, employers, and service providers.

- Improve communication among federal, state, and local literacy initiatives.

- Recommend strategies to broaden adult literacy efforts so that literacy levels of the entire family are improved.

Fiscal resources for coordination of adult literacy are severely limited. All state agencies currently responsible for planning and implementing adult education programs (including those targeted at the 16 years and older dropout population) must be required to collaborate with the Council to ensure that program plans are congruent with the statewide master plan and other applicable state plans, to issue RFPs and undertake other operational initiatives, and to maximize resources. The Council, like the SETC, will pursue a collaborative decision-making process to ensure agreement and commitment among a broad cross section of stakeholders.

The Council **will not** assume the operational authority of any state agency. Rather, it will ensure greater coordination and collaboration among agencies to meet the expectations of learners, employers, and government. Since each of the state's workforce readiness agencies will be represented on the Council, these agencies' roles in planning and oversight will not be diminished but will be shared with other stakeholders who have a clear interest in the outcomes. **Although the Council will be charged with policy development, final approval and implementation of all plans and recommendations will rest with the legally designated authorities.**

**A coordinated statewide master plan for adult literacy education that will encompass initiatives of individual state agencies be developed and integrated into the Governor's Coordination and Special Services Plan (GCSSP).** The proposed State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services should be charged with developing a broad-based statewide master plan, which seeks to integrate and coordinate all adult literacy programs. At a minimum, the plan should address service delivery, consolidation and coordination, funding and accountability, staff development and training, technology, and advocacy. This plan should be integrated into the Governor's Coordination and Special Services Plan, which will link the variety of workforce development programs and services

to provide a more comprehensive strategy for meeting the needs of individuals and employers.

**A strategy to consolidate literacy initiatives of multiple state agencies into a more manageable number should be explored and a more coherent service delivery system be developed by leveraging funds from various sources and encouraging greater collaboration at the state and local levels.** As part of a state master plan, the Council should develop a proposal to consolidate the myriad of state-supported literacy programs. Limited resources dictate a more coordinated and cost-efficient approach to service delivery. To support program improvements, we recommend the dedication of resources and energy to build the strengths of those who deliver literacy services. Consolidation will result in better administration and greater focus on goals identified in the state master plan. With less fragmentation in the system, greater opportunities will exist for marshaling resources to attain goals.

**Ensure Responsiveness to Customer Needs**

All literacy-related initiatives at the state and local levels must focus on the clients, that is, the learner, employer, and government, and their needs. To ensure that services are relevant to client needs and goals, the Task Force recommends that:

**A common assessment standard be adopted by all state-funded programs to determine current level of literacy, personal goals, and cause of any learning deficit.** Every person seeking services should be assessed. This would facilitate movement between programs and provide comparable outcome data to the state. Assessment standards should indicate the types of instruments needed to conduct learner evaluations and strategies to involve professionals who are qualified to assess learning deficits.

**Literacy skills be taught within a workplace context, where appropriate, and providers be encouraged to develop workplace literacy initiatives.** Because work-related reasons motivate most adult learners to participate in literacy programs and improved literacy will enhance their ability to find and maintain employment, this emphasis is sound public policy.

**Adult literacy strategies be linked with efforts to improve the literacy levels of entire families.** Because low literacy is often an intergenerational problem, literacy initiatives should, when possible, focus on the entire family. To accomplish this objective, greater connections between the adult education and K-12 sectors are needed.

**Information on the availability of literacy programs and related services be accessible to clients via mail, public television, telephone, and Workforce New Jersey Public Information Network (WNJPIN).** A clearinghouse should be established to collect and disseminate information. This source of information will help clients be aware of all the available options. With better information about program characteristics, clients can be directed more effectively to programs that best meet their needs and aspirations.

**An accessible and flexible literacy delivery system that responds to client needs, provides 24-hour access, offers instruction at various locations and through several media (including computers and public television) be developed.** Providers should be encouraged to develop workplace literacy initiatives that can be delivered at sites convenient to learners and employers. Technology can be utilized to create a system that is clearly focused on the individual learner's goals, while addressing the needs of government and employers. Special emphasis should be placed on the location and timing of literacy services (e.g., satellite offices, flexible hours of operation, year-round scheduling) and linkages with other services that individuals may need (e.g., health, transportation, housing, child care).

**The literacy needs of unemployed and underemployed populations, such as welfare clients, be assessed and strategies to meet their literacy needs be developed.** For those whose employment options are hampered by low literacy skills, especially those individuals on welfare, solid education strategies must be designed to empower them to move into unsubsidized employment. Therefore, it is essential to integrate literacy skills training with the skills needed to compete in the current and future labor markets.

**Optimize the Use of Technology**

Technology is an important tool in delivering curricula, and becoming proficient in the use of technology is a necessary basic skill. The Task Force therefore recommends that:

**The state build upon technology plans being developed for the K-12 and higher education systems as well as utilize the existing technology infrastructure to enhance literacy delivery.** To the extent possible, the adult education sector should connect to existing technology infrastructure, which includes television, computers, and satellite links, rather than building a completely separate system. However, students and practitioners in the adult sector must be assured of access to the technology. Only when the current infrastructure is inadequate to meet the needs, should additions be sought. Guidelines should be developed for integrating technology into curricula to optimize service delivery.

**Workforce New Jersey Public Information Network (WNJPIN) be utilized as a resource for learners and educators.** WNJPIN provides a wealth of career information. It also should include links to career development sites for educators.

**The state enlist New Jersey's communications companies in the effort to enhance the literacy delivery system through the use of technology.** Companies such as AT&T, Bell Atlantic, Bellcore, and Lucent Technologies should be encouraged to assist in the delivery of literacy programs through technology.

**Expand Staff Development Opportunities**

A comprehensive statewide staff development plan is needed to train all key stakeholders and promote information sharing. The plan should incorporate a variety of training and information-sharing strategies, including those that use technology in support of distance and self-directed learning initiatives. The Task Force recommends that:

**A statewide staff development plan that involves the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center (ALEC), which is under the supervision of the Department of Education's Office of Specialized Populations; the state's higher education institutions; and other state agencies be developed.** These initiatives should be based on the proposed state master plan. The appropriate state agencies and the state's higher education institutions should work collaboratively to ensure that the expertise of each is fully utilized to make high-quality staff development opportunities available to the field.

**Access to the materials at the resource library housed at ALEC be enhanced.** Materials should be organized for easy access and dissemination to practitioners and other stakeholders. Materials should be catalogued and this information should be accessible in hard copy and electronically. ALEC also should serve as a clearinghouse for relevant adult literacy research and materials developed by educators.

**An electronic hub for staff development and information sharing be established and accessible through WNJPIN.** This hub should provide information on ALEC's staff development activities, a compendium of information available through ALEC, discussion forums and chat rooms, and links to other literacy-related sites, including Eastern Links, Hub 1.

**The use of technology to facilitate staff development and information sharing be explored fully.** Technology can enhance the efficiency of training and staff development. Learning to use up-to-date technology is also essential for staff.

**Improve Program Accountability**

Accountability is essential to ensure quality. Strong and meaningful accountability measures must be developed throughout the system to ensure that all programs are judged by the same standards. The Task Force recommends that:

> **The Council further develop accountability measures, benchmarks, and program outcomes that are congruent with the *Unified State Plan*, federal requirements, and the recommended adult literacy plan.** Specifically, standards should measure the extent to which literacy programs better equip participants with the necessary skills to improve their workplaces, families, and communities and determine whether programs are effectively addressing customers' needs.
>
> **Program outcomes be made available to the public in an annual report on adult literacy.** All clients of the system--learners, employers, and government--should have access to program outcome information to make sound decisions about these initiatives. An annual report should be distributed in hard copy (book) and through electronic media.
>
> **Data gathered from providers be used for continuous program improvement.** In addition to providing information on the quality of programs, outcome data serve as a vehicle for making necessary changes to improve programs and the larger system.

**Improve Awareness of the Importance of Literacy Programs**

Adult literacy is not widely recognized as a priority. The importance of improving the K-12 system overshadows the need for developing an effective adult literacy system. Likewise, the learning needs of the highly literate and skilled workforce are the major focus of the private sector. To improve the public's awareness of literacy issues, the Task Force recommends that:

> **The proposed State Council for Adult Literacy Education Services work with public and private sector organizations to develop strategies to publicize the problem of low-literate populations as well as the services available to address this problem.** Adequate literacy skill for the state's citizens should be a major concern for all. Public and private sector constituents must be made aware of the benefits improved literacy levels bring to the individual and society.
>
> **Enlist New Jersey's foreign language business community in the effort to improve the awareness of the state's literacy delivery system.** These businesses often have links to foreign-born populations with limited English

proficiency. The foreign language media can make clients aware of the need for improved literacy skills and help connect clients to service providers.

**Workforce Investment Boards, local businesses, and other key stakeholders participate in training to make them aware of the major issues associated with the needs of low-literate clients and how best to serve them.** This training will better prepare WIBs and other key stakeholders to understand the issues and work at the local level to ensure that all clients' needs are addressed.

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## APPENDIX A

## LITERACY LEVELS

The reports, *Adult Literacy in New Jersey: Results of the State Adult Literacy Survey* and *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Survey*, both prepared by Educational Testing Service, were the source for the following information on literacy levels.

The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) was developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to profile the English literacy of adults in this country in their performance across a wide array of tasks that reflect the type of materials and demands they encounter in their lives. The NALS levels reflect the difficulty of the literacy tasks that the test requires persons to perform. NALS measures literacy tasks on three dimensions: Prose, Document, and Quantitative. The results on each dimension can be categorized into one of five levels, based on the literacy tasks performed in the test. At each level, a range of performance is represented, and within each level, tasks vary by difficulty. The NALS levels are not intended to provide a measure of illiteracy.

Approximately 1.2 to 1.4 million adults living in the state performed at Level 1 of NALS as indicated in *Adult Literacy in New Jersey*. The skills at Level 1 vary. Some at this level were not able to perform even common and undemanding literacy tasks while others were able to read relatively short pieces of text to find a single piece of information, to enter personal information onto an application form, or to perform simple arithmetic operations using numbers presented to them.

Between 23 to 28 percent of New Jersey adults, or some 1.4 to 1.7 million, performed at the second lowest level of proficiency (Level 2). Twenty-five to 29 percent of adults in the region and 25 to 28 percent of adults nationwide were at this level. Individuals at this level demonstrated skills in more diverse and challenging literacy tasks compared to those at Level 1. For example, at Level 2 individuals were generally able to make low-level inferences based on what they read, locate incorrect information in a document, and give correct responses to tasks involving a single arithmetic operation using numbers that can easily be found in printed material.

Approximately 30 to 32 percent of adults statewide, or between 1.8 and 1.9 million perform in Level 3. Tasks in this level tend to require readers to make matches between the task and the information in the text. These matches often require low-level inferences. Other tasks require a reader to integrate information from dense or lengthy text that contains no organizational aids such as headings. At this level, readers are also

asked to integrate multiple pieces of information from one or more documents. Two or more numbers are typically needed to solve arithmetic problems at this level.

About 16 to 18 percent of the state's adults or 1 million perform at Level 4. The task at this level require readers to perform multiple-feature matches and to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy passages. More complex inferences are needed at this level. To be successful at this level, readers must perform multiple-feature matches, cycle through documents, and integrate information that require a high degree of inferencing. Readers must also perform two or more sequential operations or a single operation in which the quantities are found in different types of displays, or the operations must be inferred or drawn from prior knowledge.

About 2 to 5 percent or around 300,000 adults in the state perform at Level 5. Some tasks in this level require the reader to search for information in dense text and displays with multiple distractors. Others require high-level inferences or use specialized background knowledge. Tasks at this level also require readers to perform multiple operations sequentially.

State data based on NALS indicate that the average scores of adults with less than a high school diploma are in the Level 1 or Level 2 range. For those who have earned a high school diploma, the average scores are at the high end of the Level 2 range and for those who have completed a college degree, in the Level 3 range. "On each literacy scale, 17 to 22 percent of the high school graduates in New Jersey performed in the Level 1 range, and another 30 to 36 percent performed in Level 2. Conversely, just 10 to 13 percent of the state's high school graduates reached the two highest levels on each scale" (Jenkins and Kirsch, 1994). Results from the scale also showed a strong association between literacy and labor market attachment status. Between 37 and 42 percent of New Jersey's employed population perform at Levels 1 and 2 of the scale, while 59 to 68 percent of the state's unemployed and adults who were out of the labor force function at the two lowest levels. Employed adults also were more likely to perform at the highest NALS literacy levels.

The NALS levels contrast with literacy levels used by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), which can be roughly equated to grade levels and divide the adult literacy population into three levels. Unlike NALS, these levels pertain only to the adult literacy education target population, not all adults, and are used by USDOE for descriptive and reporting purposes. By definition, all levels of the USDOE designation are eligible for adult literacy education, while NALS compares the total adult population's competencies to perform differing levels of literacy tasks.

## APPENDIX B

## SUMMARY
## OF THE
## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
## 1997-1998 RFP

The 1997-98 Adult Basic Skills RFP seeks to encourage programs that provide educational opportunities for adults to acquire the basic skills necessary for literate functioning, productive employment, and effective citizenship and that enable adults to complete at least a secondary school education. The RFP announced a four-year grant that is expected to increase programs' capacities to meet the needs of the adult population in an integrated, more effective and efficient manner. Anticipated results of the grant competition are proposals that include accountability measures and measurable outcomes.

Agencies eligible to apply included local educational agencies (LEAVES), postsecondary institutions, public agencies, and community-based organizations. The grant funded three categories of applicants: consortia; individual agencies that have the capacity to provide comprehensive services; and small agencies that, because of exceptional circumstances, are unable to enter into a consortia and require an exception to minimum enrollment criteria (two-year grants only). Awards went to the highest scoring eligible agency in each county for each category. Remaining funds were awarded to the highest ranking applicants in the top eight priority counties (Essex, Hudson, Bergen, Passaic, Middlesex, Union, Camden, and Ocean) based on census data.

The comprehensive adult education services include the following:

- instruction for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL);
- adult secondary education;
- a curriculum that is linked to preparation for the workplace, life skills, and citizenship;
- a system to provide support services, either on-site or through coordination with other social services agencies;
- coordinated and cooperative arrangements with School-to-Work, welfare reform efforts, WIBs, and One-Stop Career Center System networks;
- ongoing staff development focusing on requirements for success in the workplace, literacy instruction, and use of community resources;
- a system for providing services to specialized populations, such as adults with disabilities;
- requirements for increased hours of instruction to enable adults to have greater access to programs;

- flexibility in delivery sites (e.g., classroom, workplace, community work experience sites);
- flexibility in method of service delivery (e.g., traditional classroom, distance learning);
- a process for recruiting and serving adults that have been identified at the lowest levels of literacy;
- a process for recruiting and providing services to the welfare population.

## APPENDIX C

## KEY FINDINGS
## FROM RESEARCH ON OTHER STATES

### BACKGROUND

The Task Force on Adult Literacy formed the Subcommittee on Research on Other States and charged it with identifying models and best practices from other states that could serve as examples worth emulating or modifying to fit the New Jersey context.

To accomplish its task, the Subcommittee decided to select and interview a small group of experts who had a national perspective and were able to compare state systems and local programs. It was also important that the experts' data were current and based on first-hand analysis. The Subcommittee chose not to do a literature review because practice tends to outpace the literature and not provide national comparisons.

The Subcommittee selected the following four key experts and interviewed them by telephone using questions from an interview schedule:

> Dr. Paul Germ is a fellow of the National Institute for Literacy and has conducted research nationally on workplace literacy.
>
> Judy Alanprese has conducted research nationally on literacy programs and provided technical assistance to programs.
>
> Andy Hartman directs the National Institute for Literacy in Washington, D.C., which is a national resource for literacy programs, provides technical assistance to the field, and conducts research.
>
> Ron Pugsley directs the US Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, which distributes federal literacy funds to the states and monitors the use of these funds.

### RESULTS

In analyzing the results, the Task Force focused on how states with advanced literacy systems develop them and what elements make these systems effective. The Task Force identified several critical principles of effective adult literacy systems and program development.

**Critical Principles**

1. **Leadership**
   States with well-developed adult literacy systems have nurtured partnerships between local providers, their State Departments of Education, and other critical stakeholders. Leadership is exercised both "bottom-up" and "top down." The State Offices of Adult Education focus exclusively on adult education, and, in most cases, these offices have a staff of professionals who do outreach and technical assistance. Collaborations between the state office, stakeholder groups, and local providers exist, and these partners work together to identify needs and plan programmatic responses to them.

2. **Centralized Coordination**
   A coordinating body facilitates adult literacy policy development, planning, and program implementation. This entity either directs funding to programs or influences how and to whom funds are distributed. It fosters interagency coordination and involves a broad cross section of stakeholders in its work.

3. **Strategic Planning and Response**
   States with well-developed adult literacy systems target funds strategically to solve problems and to develop support structures. Funding derived from Section 353 of the Adult Education Act is allocated to support strategic initiatives. These states are effective in combining different funding streams to solve problems. There is a strategic plan that persons at all levels are aware of and support.

4. **Customer-Driven**
   The system is oriented to the customer. Needs of students, adult education staff, and other stakeholders (e.g., employers) are assessed in a consistent and systematic way. Programs are then designed to address these needs. The system has mechanisms to get ongoing evaluations from stakeholders and to modify programs as warranted.

5. **Infrastructure**
   A well-developed infrastructure exists for communication at state and local levels. Communication flows frequently, consistently, and effectively between the two levels. Staff development is a critical element of the infrastructure, and the system is designed to support it. Staff development is comprehensive, participatory, and well sequenced. Technology is part of the infrastructure and is used to support staff development and learning. Adequate funds are invested in staff development and other elements of infrastructure.

6. **Support and Trust**
There is a spirit of trust, openness, and cooperation among the state adult education office, other state agencies, local providers, and other critical stakeholders. Each level supports the efforts of the others. There is political support from the Governor's office and at all levels of the State's Department of Education.

7. **Staff Development**
A comprehensive customer-driven system for staff development provides opportunities for local program staff to participate in planning. Staff have short- and long-term development opportunities that receive adequate support from combined resources.

8. **Effective/Efficient Funding**
Literacy funds from various sources are combined to carry out a common state agenda. Funds are coordinated and pooled. Creative and innovative systems for synergistic use of funds are devised. The states' contribution to literacy dollars exceed federal matching requirements and are based on system goals and an assessment of need.

9. **Accountability**
Accountability measures provide data that highlight the accomplishments and practices of outstanding programs, offering compelling evidence for their continued funding. Accountability measures are flexible enough to allow practitioners to define outcome standards within a broader federal, state, and local policy framework. However, common language and measures allow for comparisons. These measures focus not only on the concerns of funding sources, but on those of learners, practitioners, and other audiences interested in knowing what literacy programs can accomplish.

Key concerns that must be addressed in developing accountability measures are as follows:

> To what extent do literacy programs better equip participants with the necessary skills to improve their workplaces, families, and communities?
>
> Are programs effectively addressing customers' (e.g., learners, employers, government) needs?
>
> How are stakeholder groups (e.g., employers, unions, particular demographic groups, social service providers) involved in the system?

How does staff development correlate with improved delivery and increased professionalism?

Does the system have the capacity to address stated goals and objectives? Are there sufficient financial and human resources to meet state, local, and program objectives? Are these resources used efficiently? How can resources from a variety of sources be combined for maximum benefit?

What are effective applications of technology in delivering service and training staff? Is access to technology and training adequate?

What techniques are most effective in recruiting and retaining adult learners? Are public relations efforts appropriate to inform learners and other stakeholders about literacy endeavors?

10. **Delivery System**

The delivery system is comprehensive and intensive. Highest need areas receive the greatest attention with appropriate funding to support this attention. Money is distributed on the basis of comprehensive planning, and funding is targeted to priority areas. Although resources are consolidated so that fewer but more comprehensive programs are funded, sufficient time is allowed for planning and system change. Through state and local collaboration, the system is well planned.

11. **Workforce Education**

A focus on workplace literacy has become an essential element of the overall literacy effort because of states' attention to workforce development and welfare-to-work. Within the workplace setting, contextualized programs (skills taught within the context of the work environment) are provided as are structured ABE/GED programs. Workforce literacy education is a partnership among employers, participants, and providers. Employers are often asked to share the cost of education/training and to make a commitment to continue programs after state funding is depleted.

12. **Technology**

Electronic delivery of literacy services is incorporated into the overall literacy plan and through the State Department of Education. Local providers are encouraged to include technology in their delivery mechanisms. Public TV also is interwoven into the delivery system, providing programs such as "Crossroads Café" to students at home, work, or educational settings. To facilitate communication, curriculum, and staff development, e-mail and Internet capabilities are being extended to providers, state policy makers, and other stakeholders of the system.

**Subcommittee Recommendations**

1. Within the appropriate state agency an Office of Adult Education should be established.

2. A council, commission, or authority should be made responsible for literacy coordination at the state level. This body is empowered to establish policy and foster interagency planning and program implementation. The body also has authority for approval of funding, and the funding preferably is channeled through it. The coordinating body is the hub for all block grant funding. Membership on this "literacy coordinating body" includes the various state and local agencies and stakeholder groups for adult education and workforce readiness.

3. Through the work of the "literacy coordinating body," the state plan for adult education should be revised. This plan, which must be a dynamic document, should be strategic and include a focus on workforce readiness as outlined in the *Unified State Plan*. All stakeholder groups should participate in and contribute to developing the state plan for adult education. WIBs should be systematically involved in developing the plan and in its continual revision. As a public document, the plan should be made available to all constituents.

4. Under the coordination of the "literacy coordinating body," a mechanism for continuous assessment of customer needs should be developed. WIBs should be involved in the process to ensure that local concerns are addressed. Customer needs should be communicated to providers and built into programs. Customer needs also should serve as criteria in program assessment.

5. The state needs a literacy server and a literacy WEB page for which the "literacy coordinating body" should be responsible. Access to this communication infrastructure should be free and available to all providers and state agencies. As part of funding for literacy programs through state agencies, providers should be able to purchase technology links.

6. The "literacy coordinating body" should be charged with developing a system for program and staff development, information sharing, and research. Access to materials and follow-up information should be an integral component. There should be a continuous flow of information, facilitated through, but not limited to, e-mail and Internet communications. The "literacy coordinating body" should serve as a clearinghouse for training activities of the Adult Literacy Enhancement Center (ALEC) and other publicly funded state and local programs that are relevant to the professional development of literacy providers and other professionals that serve low-literate clients. The body should help connect these

programs in meaningful ways and engage them in collaborative planning, development, and delivery of staff development.

7. The "literacy coordinating body" will have state authority to inventory all public literacy funds and to recommend ways of better leveraging them for maximum benefit.

8. Through the auspices of the "literacy coordinating body," a system of accountability that reflects the key concerns identified under the "Accountability" section above should be developed.

9. Through the planning process of the "literacy coordinating body," which includes state and local leaders, a comprehensive and intensive delivery system should be developed. Program funding should be apportioned according to the level of need in the area and the number of clients served. Efforts to achieve consolidation and collaboration within the delivery system should be facilitated through a planning process that allots sufficient time for this transition.

10. Expansion of workplace literacy initiatives should be directed toward companies that have a large percentage of workers needing literacy services. Innovative programs should be developed to support the state's Work First and Workforce New Jersey initiatives. These programs should be linked to the One-Stop Career Centers, with a focus on the use of technology to facilitate program intake and to deliver distance learning instructional activities to remote sites, such as the workplace, home, and One-Stop Centers.

## APPENDIX D

## TASK FORCE ON ADULT LITERACY
## SUMMARY OF COMMENTS
## PUBLIC HEARING JUNE 1997

Comments below represent a summary of public testimony at three public hearings in June 1997. These comments don't necessarily represent the view of the Task Force.

**1a. How can technology be used to enhance instruction?**

*Benefits of technology:*

- Computers add flexibility to instruction and can be adapted to learning styles.
- Internet access provides learners with a wealth of resources.
- Computer-aided instruction encourages learners to become familiar and comfortable with the keyboard and the technology of the workplace.
- Computer-aided instruction builds self-esteem since the learner can feel "on the cutting edge."
- Learners receive immediate feedback.
- Learners progress at their own pace.
- Computers can be helpful in a multilevel classroom.
- One screen at a time can be psychologically easier than an entire book.
- Distance learning is becoming a more viable alternative.

*Drawbacks of technology:*

- Computers offer students no way to question and interact with instructors.
- Programs that offer computer-only learning with no tutors or instructors experience extremely high dropout rates.
- Many programs cannot afford the costs associated with installing workstations and getting online capabilities.
- Programs may have only a limited number of workstations available
  In order for computer-aided instruction to be effective, program staff must be fully trained on applications, software, and troubleshooting.

**1b . How can technology facilitate communication and training among providers?**

Technology offers providers multiple means to share information, developments in the field, and effective teaching methods, including the following:

- E-mail
- Teleconferencing
- Interactive video for meetings
- Internet postings

2. **How can literacy training be effectively integrated with the state's workforce readiness initiative?**

Workforce readiness is not possible without literacy skills. Students with the lowest levels of literacy skills are either unemployable or employable only at the lowest paying jobs.

- Literacy programs can coordinate with One-Stop Career Centers to provide services.
- Include literacy screening and diagnostic testing as part of the intake procedure; closely monitor the progress of students to ensure they can begin job training as soon as they are ready.
- Basic skills assessment and training must be at the foundation of any workforce readiness program. Without effective comprehension and communication skills, long-term employment is not possible.
- The State Employment and Training Commission has embarked on an ambitious initiative to improve the employment prospects and productivity of the emerging and current workforce. Central to the new economy and to the workforce development initiative is a well-trained, highly-skilled workforce.
- The role of WIBs in the literacy system must be clarified and strengthened to ensure full integration.

3. **What cooperative measures can be developed among public and private providers of literacy services?**

Providers must be aware of all services in order to maximize their effectiveness and reach as many in need as possible.

- Establish a database or directory of services available.
- Cooperation is necessary among volunteer programs, libraries, social service agencies, and educational institutions.
- Programs need a common vision.
- Literacy programs should be linked to on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and mentoring/employment partnerships.
- Develop standardized forms and terminology; give providers access to a database of providers.

4. **How can literacy services be better coordinated to serve the user?**

- Because many users have limited access to transportation, strategies to bring learners to the classroom or to bring instruction to learners must be developed. Locate services in close proximity to learners.
- Provide flexible scheduling at hours convenient to learners.
- Individual assessment of users' needs must be an essential component of the system. After testing, individuals can be directed to programs targeted at their special needs. Learning disabilities should be assessed, and students should be taught how to learn.
- Providers must differentiate services to suit individual needs.

- Representatives from community colleges and libraries suggest that these institutions can serve as focal points for delivery of services.
- Providers must strive to improve program quality.
- Place greater focus on retaining students. Focus programs on learners' expressed needs. Programs must be flexible in addressing learner needs.
- Literacy programs should have a case management component to address other problems affecting learners.
- Educators should consider learning styles in developing curriculum and delivering instruction.
- There need to be more programs for students with reading levels below the eighth grade.
- The state should establish an interagency adult literacy consortium.
- The adult literacy delivery system should be less threatening so that potential learners are encouraged to apply.
- Programs should help build learners' confidence and self-esteem.
- Opportunities for low-literate clients to improve their literacy skills should be available through welfare reform program.
- There is a need to continually educate the general public about the problems of low-literate adults.
- The SETC and WIBs should develop a listing of recognized "experts" in the field of adult literacy and the various disciplines such as ESL, ABE, GED, literacy technology, and workplace literacy.
- Develop a long-range, comprehensive statewide training program that is open to and actively promoted among all adult literacy providers, public and private.
- Appoint a full-time state director of adult education and allow practitioners input into state adult education policy.

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Herbert Whitehouse, Whitehouse Law Firm
Harriet Hems Wright, JH Wright Construction, Inc.
Henry A. Plotkin, Executive Director

Commission on Higher Education
P. O. Box 542
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0542

609/292-4310

New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission
P. O. Box 940
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0940

609/633-0605

609-633-1354

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